

September 17, 2008

Inglis bucks party, votes for energy bill

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WASHINGTON - Rep. Bob Inglis bucked his party Tuesday and voted for the House energy bill that promises to open up most U.S. coast for oil drilling.

The bill passed 236-189 with most Republicans, including Rep. Gresham Barrett, R-Westminster, voting against it. Inglis, R-Travelers Rest, said it was better to get something done than to do nothing.

"Over and over, (constituents) asked why Congress can't work together to get something done," Inglis said. "This measure is far short of what we need, but it's a start."

The House bill would open up most U.S. coast, including South Carolina's, for oil drilling, require power companies to use more wind and renewable power and provide tax benefits to buyers of plug-in hybrid vehicles.

"It expands domestic drilling offshore and on land," said Rep. James Clyburn, D-Columbia, who voted for the bill. "It expands renewable sources of energy and creates good paying jobs here at home."

Barrett's office didn't return a call for comment. But many Republicans voted against the bill because they said it would limit offshore drilling to at least 50 miles beyond the coast and wouldn't provide an incentive - in the form of oil royalties - for states to approve drilling.

Some critics also say that requiring all utilities to produce at least 15 percent of their electricity from solar, wind and other renewable sources would raise utility bills.

The House bill is different than a Senate version and probably won't pass Congress in the few weeks remaining in the session.

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^The House bill:

- Allows states to propose oil and natural gas drilling 50 or 100 miles off their coast, and drilling on land for shale oil in some Rocky Mountain states.
 - Requires power companies to produce 15 percent of their electricity from wind, solar and other green power by 2020.
 - Offers tax credits for the purchase of plug-in hybrid electric cars and to make homes more energy efficient.
 - Amends leases granted to oil companies in the late 1990s to require them to pay royalties for drilling on federal lands.
 - Renews tax credits for solar, wind and other renewable power producers.
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